

LOVE

JOHN 3:16-18

A few weeks ago, I made a comment during my first sermon on Habakkuk that caused some people in the congregation to be confused. That statement concerned the idea that God hates. Here is how I said it during the message:

“I know we like to think that God loves everyone in the world, but the Bible makes it clear that that is not the case.”

I then quoted from...

Psalm 11:5 The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. (ESV)

Because of the confusion, I wrote an article that looked at the idea of hate as it relates to God and posted it on my blog. I encourage you to go to the blog and read the article for yourself.

It is certainly not an exhaustive or complete study of the topic, but may answer some questions for you and possibly bring to mind some new ones.

In the article, I said that the statement may have been more effectively and accurately stated if I had said it like this:

“I know we like to think that God has only love for every person in the world, but the Bible makes it very clear that God does hate some people.”

The fact is that the statement, no matter how it was worded, would still have caused several people some confusion, because it is so difficult for us to grasp the concept that God, Who, as the Apostle John wrote, is love (1 John 4:8,16) could hate without violating His nature, which of course, God cannot do.

So the first four-letter word I want to speak to you about this morning is love.

At best, the concept of the love of God is one of the most difficult subjects to understand in Scripture.

Another document I put on the blog is a book by D.A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*. The book is 93 pages, but is printed in a large font that makes it a simple read and one that will not take you very long.

I. God's love is universal

If you ask almost anyone to define the characteristics of God, almost everyone would first quote 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” Even an atheist, who says that he doesn't even believe in a God, would, if coerced to do so, identify love as the most notable characteristic of God.

What we have lost is the appreciation for God's wrath – His hatred of sin – His anger at iniquity – His holy terror.

Psalm 7:11 God is a righteous judge, and a God who executes justice every day. 12 If anyone does not repent, God will sharpen His sword; He has strung His bow and made it ready. 13 He has prepared His deadly weapons; He tips His arrows with fire.

Hebrew 10:31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

When the subject of the love of God comes up, the first verse that comes to mind – almost without fail – is John 3:16.

John 3:16-18

John 12:46-47

1 John 2:2

There are many other verses that express this same sentiment, but no one with an open mind and a heart that is sensitive to God's Spirit should deny that these verses express that God is universally in love with mankind – that the love of God for humanity is universal.

In fact, listen to this quote concerning ***John 3:16-17*** from a source that will likely surprise many of you.

John Calvin

...faith in Christ brings life to all, and *that* Christ brought life, because the Heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish....

...he has employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers.

Such is also the import of the term *world*, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in *the world* that is worthy of the favor of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life....it is the peculiar office of the Son of God, that *all who believe* may obtain salvation by him....

II. God's love is unconditional

Further understanding will also demonstrate that the love of God is unconditional. But this is a concept that we need to explore a bit further.

God's love is unconditional in two senses.

1. God's love is unconditional in terms of general grace.

In fact, God's purpose in creation was so that He could show His love and be loved in return.

This kind of love is referred to as general grace or providential love or as benevolent love. In other words, God does not love because He is under some obligation to love, but because it is His very nature to do so. He is benevolent – He is love.

He created, He sustains, and by Him all things consist. The blessings of God fall on the just and on the unjust.

But we need to note that this is not a saving kind of love or else everyone would get saved. And Jesus taught that everyone would not be saved...

Matt. 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

...and that some who thought they were saved really weren't.

Matt. 7:21 Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven.

This benevolent kind of love is also not the kind of love that works everything out for the good of those loved.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (ESV)

Benevolent love – the love associated with God's common grace – is His love lavished on all men even though none deserve it. It is the Creator making kindly provision for the creation.

Psalms 145:9,15,16 The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works...You give them their food in due time...You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

2. God's love is unconditional in terms of special grace.

This is that grace which calls a man to an awareness of his sin in contrast to the perfect righteousness of God and brings him to a point of repentance and forgiveness and justification.

God does love all of humankind with the kind of love that leads God to draw men out of their depravity and condition of lostness into His marvelous light.

And He does that even while we are sinners.

Roman 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

God's regenerating love has no preconditions. He does not regenerate – give us new birth – in response to our meeting some condition of faith. It is the new birth that enables us to have faith and believe.

God loves because He chooses to love and because He is love, not because of any obligation to do so or because there is any merit in man to deserve being loved.

Jer. 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

In spite of the fact that man is unworthy of God's love, He continues to demonstrate His unconditional love for humanity by showering us with blessings and goodness and mercy and compassion through common grace and benevolent love, and He continues to redeem lost souls through his saving love and special grace.

III. God's love is unlimited for the redeemed, but it is not unlimited for the wicked.

1. Not unlimited for the wicked

The providential or benevolent love that God has for mankind is not an eternal kind of love. It is universal in that it applies to the whole world – to all of mankind. It is unconditional in that man does not do anything to deserve God's beneficent love.

It is not unlimited, however, in that God, while longsuffering, will not wait forever for man to repent.

Throughout Scripture, God calls for the sinner to repent. He is patient and longsuffering and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (**Ez. 33.11**).

But this appeal for man's repentance and submission to God's lordship is terminal – it does come to an end – to a place in time where God will no longer continue His appeals.

Gen. 6:3 *And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall*

be an hundred and twenty years...⁵ And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...⁷ And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth...

Gen. 15:13 *And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; ¹⁶ But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*

This is the point where the issue of God expressing hate comes into the discussion. When God is preparing the nation of Israel for its entry into the Promised Land, He says to Moses...

Lev. 20:23 *Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I shall drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them.*

This is another reference to the Amorites whose time is now full. God has given them nearly 500 years to come to a point of redemption, and they have refused.

Now, He abhors them and instructs the Hebrews to completely destroy them.

Many people will argue the point and say that God hates the sin, but He loves the sinner. I remind you that, when the Israelites came into the Promised Land, it was not the sin of the Amorites that was destroyed, but the Amorites themselves.

When the final day of judgment comes at the end of the world, God will not be casting sin into the eternal punishment of hell – He will be casting the sinners – the wicked – those who have refused to call upon the name of the Lord.

Prov. 6:16 *There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁹ A false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.*

Verse 19 very clearly identifies, not a sin, but the sinner. God hates the sin of false testimony and the sin of causing conflict

within the body, but this verse makes it clear that He also hates the person who continues to practice such sins even when confronted with their sin – who refuse to cease or fail to repent from such practices.

Hosea 9:15 All their evil is at Gilgal; indeed, I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more...

God's love is unconditional, but His anger and wrath and His hatred are all very conditional. God is love by nature and is, therefore, patient and kind and forbearing, full of grace and mercy.

But He is also a God of justice and righteousness and holiness who cannot tolerate the practice of sin and obstinate wickedness and the continued snubbing of His call for repentance.

Notice that everywhere hatred is mentioned there is long-term, continuous, obstinate rebellion against the grace of God.

The sin of Israel in **Hosea 9.15** was the practice of idol worship in the place that had been set aside for the exclusive worship of Jehovah. The people had been warned over and over against such practices, but felt that God would never really do anything to them. After all, we must remember that God is love.

Yet this was no common sin. This was not men wandering in the darkness, but men refusing the truth in the full light of the knowledge of God's Law and God's teaching.

As a result, God not only expresses His hatred for such people, but He even declares, "I will love them no more."

Yet even in all of this, God's character is still love and His desire is still that all of Israel – and all of the world – should be saved.

2. Unlimited for the redeemed

When we look back at John 3.16, we are reminded once again that ***"God so loved..."***

I have said it before, but it bears repeating, that this is not a statement of degree – it is not a measure of how much God loved – but a statement of method.

How did God love?

He loved the way that only an eternal and loving and forgiving God could love – with a love that is also eternal and without limits.

Salvation comes to man by the call of God on their hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 makes it very clear that those whom He has called, ***"them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."***

Since salvation is totally in the control of God, then not only are we justified, sanctified, and glorified, but we are also preserved.

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's love for the redeemed is without repentance. He never hates those who are His sheep because their sin has been covered by the blood of Christ's sacrifice – moved as far as the East is from the West.

Those who have confessed with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, who believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead are secure in their salvation.

God – so filled with wrath over the sinfulness of the world – loved that world in such a way that he sent His only begotten Son.

God himself offered the only sacrifice that was sufficient to cover the sins of the world and to reconcile that world to himself.

Do you want to see a picture of God's wrath and hatred of sin? Look at the cross.

Do you want to see a picture of God's eternal love? Look at the cross.